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HOMICIDE TRENDS IN MALTA FROM 1970-2018: FIRST FINDINGS

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Abstract

Homicide in Malta is not a common crime. Till the present day there is no academic research that inquires the trends associated with this heinous act. After analysing aspects related to homicide committed between 1970 till the latest in 2018, the paper aims at providing the first findings on homicide trends in the islands of Malta. The findings aim at providing the significant statistical outcomes related to homicide trends particularly in relation to the modus operandi, gender, relationship between the offender and homicide clearance.

Key words

Homicide research, homicide incidence, modus operandi, gender, relationships, age and nationality and homicide clearance

INTRODUCTION

Research on homicide in Malta per se is practically non-existent. A quick search within the library of the University of Malta one finds that the phenomenon of homicide is tackled only from a legal perspective. These few works explore the legal notions treating the following: the intent (Camilleri, 2010); the excusability of homicide (Demicoli, 1983); the duty of care in relation to crime of wilfulness and involuntary homicide (Cutajar, 2013); and the development of the law on homicide in relation to euthanasia and assisted suicide (Camilleri, 2008). From a criminological point of view homicide has never been scrutinised in-depth and homicide trends in Malta tend to remain very much unveiled. Additionally, when researchers attempt to analyse homicide trends in Malta one can notice that the results obtained from these islands is very limited. For instance, Smit, de Jong and Bijleveld (2012) explained that Malta was one of few countries that did not respond to their questionnaire which was aimed at looking at the definitions, sources and statistics of homicide data in Europe.

Being a small island state Malta is sometimes excluded from the analysis of homicide trends among European nations for pragmatic reasons (Marshall and Summers, 2012: 42). These different reasons and approaches limit the analysis of trends of homicide in Malta even though this could be potentially significant, as countries like “Estonia, Malta, and Sweden have the

highest proportion of homicides committed with knives and sharp implements, at 60% or more" (Marshall and Summers, 2012: 62) In cross-national observations on homicide research Rogers and Pridemore (2012) explicated the geographic and temporal variations on homicides, and indicated that in 2010 the homicide rate in Malta was of 1.0, where the rate for male homicides was of 1.5 while for females was of 0.5. Rogers and Pridemore (2012: 33-34) also stressed that, together with a number of other countries, Malta experienced an increase in both male and female homicide victimization rates in the period analysed.

Looking at *Homicide in Europe*, Liem (2017: 291) explained how Europe does not have a long tradition of studying trends and patterns of homicides and there are large differences among European countries. Among the difference there legal inconsistencies in defining homicide as well as the data sources of this crime. In the same work Liem (2017) explicated how the European Homicide Monitor (EHM) is enabling comparison among European countries where Malta is included. The EHM looks at homicides that occurred between 2000 and 2015 outlining the sources of the data, the homicide counts and the rate per 100,000 among other details. As indicated later in this paper the most distinctive year was 2012 where with 10 homicides the rate per 100,000 inhabitants rose to 2.4, where 75% of the victims were male. However, the EHM ignores the previous years and the respective incidences. For instance in 1981 and 1999 indicate the highest incidence of homicides for male and female victims respectively (see Figure 3).

The four main approaches existent in the research on homicide in Europe, namely sociological, historical, psychological and descriptive (Liem, 2017: 292). Of these four approaches Malta had a direct contribution only in the descriptive approach, which is the most voluminous and fast growing (Kivivuori, Suonpää, and Lehti, 2014). The by-product of the COST Action on femicide was the book *Femicide across Europe: Theory, research and prevention*, by Weil, Corradi and Naudi (2018), with the latter being a Maltese academic. In discussing the challenges and opportunities of data collection, Schröttle and Meshkova (2018: 45) referred to Naudi's (2015) contribution in a meeting in Brussels among the stakeholders of COST Action Femicide across Europe while stressing, "it is very clear that Europe needs more accurate data and statistics on femicide in order to gain a better understanding of the issue of femicide as well as data and information that are necessary for prevention. The aim is to collect meaningful data, and to evaluate and document it in a way that is useful for social

policies and practice." Though the focus of this COST Action was on femicide, the research on homicide should be exploited to potentially prevent similar cases. However, when considering the phenomenon of homicide in its totality, particularly in Malta, though the numbers are not particularly big, details of heinous cases of homicide should be thoroughly examined to identify potentially preventative measures.

Being aware of the lacunae in the analysis of homicide in Malta and forming part of the European Homicide Research Group, as part the European Society of Criminology I decided to present a series of analysis on homicides that occurred in Malta from 1970 to the latest cases of that occurred in 2018. This paper aims at providing an overview of the first results of the homicide trends in the Maltese islands with the aim of expanding the research on homicide in Malta.

METHODOLOGY

Before providing the methodological approach adopted to research the trends of homicide in Malta it was important that the term homicide was defined in a legal manner as this determine the approach of the police force. Found under Title VIII of the Criminal Code of Malta (Chapter 9 of the laws 'Of crimes against the person' includes the definitions and punishments of wilful, involuntary and justifiable homicide as well as the terms of concealment of homicide, dead bodies and bodily harm and also includes infanticide and ill-treatment of children. Article 211 (2) defines 'wilful homicide' as follows "a person shall be guilty of wilful homicide if, maliciously, with intent to kill another person or to put the life of such other person in manifest jeopardy, he causes the death of such other person." Although there are may be different circumstances and intentions behind the death of a person, the cases that were included in this research were only those cases that were deliberate and intended to cause death and those were death ensued following the intention to cause serious bodily harm. Those cases there where there was no direct intention to kill at all but death still occurs through an act of negligence or were where there was the intention to kill but for some reason the homicide did not occur were not included in the list.

In order to access the data of the homicide that occurred in the Maltese islands in the last 48 years I used multiple methods that were superimposed to ensure the all relevant details for this study were gathered. The primary source of such data was gathered from the Homicide Squad within the Malta Police Force. The Homicide Squad had already some of the data available mainly because of request from the Maltese parliament. For instance one of the parliamentary questions posed in October 2017 queried the number of homicide cases that occurred between 1996 and 2017 and how many of these were solved or otherwise[1]. In addition to the data available with the Homicide Squad I requested for further details which could eventually facilitate the analysis found below such as for instance the involvement of drugs and alcohol or the relationship between the victim and the offender.

To add information which was somehow missing or unavailable within the police records, particularly for old cases, I used the Attard's (2011; 2012) books *Delitti f'Malta*[2]. Attard's works provide details from open sources, mainly newspapers and court sentences, on all homicide cases that occurred between 1800 to 2012. If details were missing from more recent cases open sources proved to be the perfect tool to fill in the blanks.

The data on over 200 cases of homicide was analysed using mainly SPSS version 24. However, it is important to indicate that since that the results below focus on the victims of these homicides. Further analysis will be undertaken to analyse details on the respective cases that would delve into the offenders' mental state and motivation vis-à-vis their modus operandi and how this could have influenced sentencing. The main findings of this paper provide a description as well as results through cross analysis, employing mainly the chi-squared test.

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1 http://pq.gov.mt/PQWeb.nsf/7561f7daddf0609ac1257d1800311f18/c1257d2e0046dfa1c12581c900445504!OpenDocument

2 Translated to *Homicide in Malta*

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The first findings of the homicides analysed in the window from 1970 to 2018 are divided into three aspects and discussed vis-à-vis literature. First this work will delved into the statistics of homicide in comparison with international incidence. Secondly this paper will look at the trends of the modus operandi in homicides in Malta. The third aspect will explore how the relationship between the victim and the offender tends to influence the way a person is killed.

HOMICIDE INCIDENCE

In 48 years in Malta occurred 239 cases of homicides. Most (92.5%) of these cases (see Table 1) involved only one victim. Almost 6% of the cases involved 2 victims, while only 2 cases involved 3 victims. One of these two cases involved a killing spree with a shotgun, while the other was a mother pregnant with two kids. In the latter case the police considered a homicide with three victims even though the kids were still not born. It was important to describe this case because in cases where gender is involved these two unborn victims were never identified as male or female and consequently affected results that included gender.

There are cases committed by the same offender in different days and periods. Though the offender is a common element the cases were still listed down separately since the focus is purely on the victims. When analysing the data focusing on the offenders this could eventually change. does not exclude that there were cases that were eventually linked to the same offender/s. Though this is not a frequent occurrence, since it was identified only a couple of times in all these years, this aspect will not be explored in this paper. The total number victims of homicide in all these years amounts to 255.

Table 1: Number of victims

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Homicide cases	1 Victim	221	93.2
	2 Victims	14	5.9
	3 Victims	2	.8
	Total	237	100.0

Slightly over 67% of all the homicide victims were male while almost 33% were female (see Figure 1).

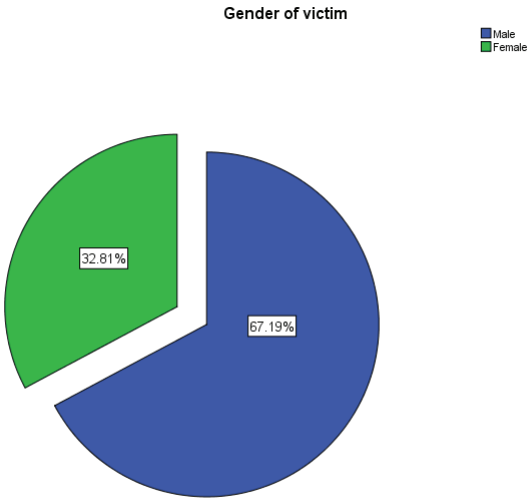


Figure 1: Gender of victims

From all the ages available of the victims it is indicated that the highest percentages of are those in the range from 21 to 50 years which cover 56.9% of all homicides in the last almost 50 years (Table 2). As for the age of the offender, results show that the highest percentage fall in the ranges of 21 to 30 years (20.9%) and 31 to 40 years of age (19.9%).

Table 2: Age of victim

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	0-10 years	5	2.1
	11-20 years	16	6.7
	21-30 years	51	21.3
	31-40 years	55	22.9
	41-50 years	39	16.3
	51-60 years	29	12.1
	61-70 years	24	10.0
	71-80 years	14	5.8
	81-90 years	7	2.9
	Total	240	100.0
Missing	System	15	
Total		255	

For the purpose of this paper the victims of homicides were separated as Maltese and non-Maltese. 84.7% of the victims were of Maltese nationality, of which 66.4% were male and 33.6% were female.

The overall average of homicides as from 1970 to 2018 in Malta is of 4.1. The highest number of case of homicides occurred in 2012 where the number rose up to 13. When analysing the incidence per 100,000 the rate of homicide in Malta is of 1.4 (Figure 2). When considering that non-Maltese offenders tend to target non-Maltese victims (see Table 9, below), it was considered viable filter the homicide incidence by excluding those homicide cases that were committed by non-Maltese offenders. The homicide incident would go down to 1.2 (Figure 3).

Figure 4 shows the homicide incidence of homicide incidence between male and female victims per 100,000 population of the same gender between 1977 and 2017. The change in the span of time was determined by the data available on the respective genders found on Eurostat. The overall incidence is that there are more male tend to be victims of homicide than female. For both genders the incidence has been going down through the years though for male it appears to be more evident. The highest peak for male homicides occurred in 1981 with 5.2, while in case of homicide of female victims the main peak was in 1999, with 3.6.

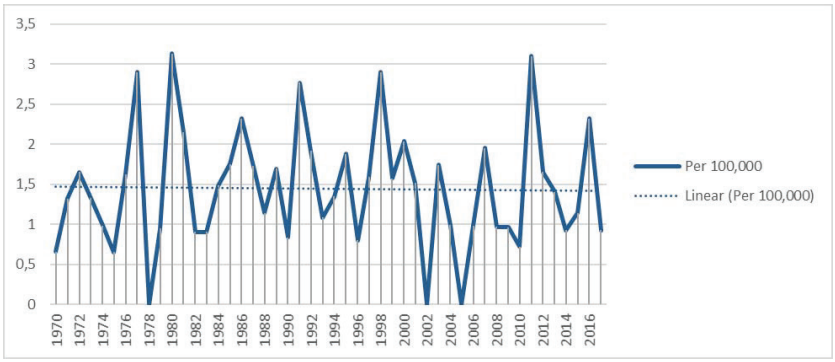


Figure 2: Homicides per 100,000

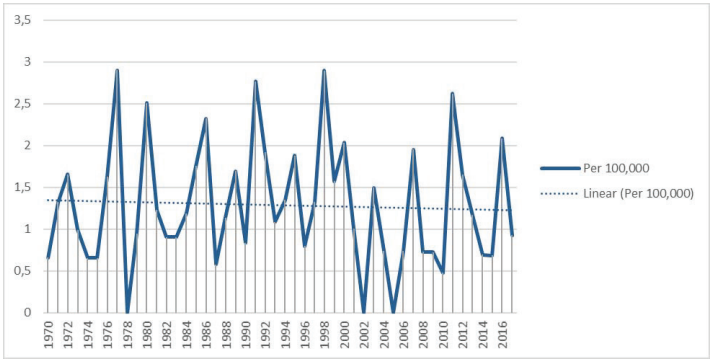


Figure 3: Homicides per 100,000 excluding homicides committed by non-Maltese

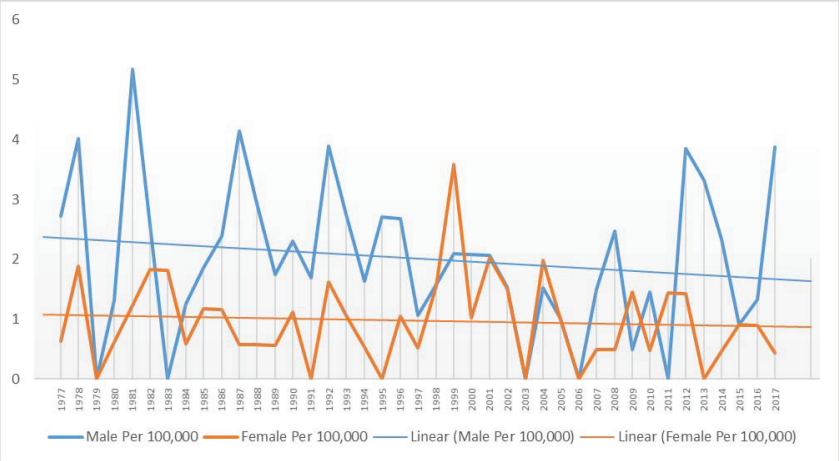


Figure 4: Homicides incidence: Male and Female per 100,000 (1977-2017)

HOMICIDE TRENDS

Some of methods employed in killing remain quite rudimentary and thus easy to classify. However, other modus operandi were so unique and unusual that were considered as 'other or unknown'. Some of these unusual methods employed included the burning of the victim alive, firing nails at the head of the victim and induced overdose. In other cases the bodies were so severely decomposed that the method of killing could not be identified. Table 3 indicates that two mores common methods of killing used on the victims were shooting (40.8%), followed by stabbing (24.3%). It is also important to take note that there are instances where more than one modus operandi (MO) is employed. Table 4 shows that there a second MO was employed in combination with the first methods in 6.2% of the cases (N=16) The two MOs that were mostly used as a second method were stabbing and hitting with a blunt object.

Table 3: Modus operandi

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	Stabbing	62	24.3
	Shooting	104	40.8
	Asphyxia/Strangulation	26	10.2
	Hit by blunt object / Blows / Fall	30	11.8
	Run over by vehicle	4	1.6
	Explosion	15	5.9
	Hijack	2	.8
	Other / unknown	12	4.7
	Total	255	100.0

Table 4: Second *modus operandi* employed

			Primary modus operandi				Total
			Shooting	Asphyxia / Strangulation	Hit by blunt object / Blows / Fall	Other / unknown	
Second modus operandi	Stabbing	Count	4	1	0	0	5
		% MO2	80.0%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	Asphyxia/ Strangulation	Count	0	0	2	0	2
		% MO2	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	Hit by blunt object / Blows / Fall	Count	3	1	0	0	4
		% MO2	75.0%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	Killed & burned body	Count	1	0	1	0	2
		% MO2	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	Dissected body / Buried / Found in Well	Count	1	0	0	2	3
		% MO2	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	66.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	9	2	3	2	16
		% MO2	56.3%	12.5%	18.8%	12.5%	100.0%

X^2 (12) = 22.770, p=0.030

The method employed to commit the homicide was also compared to the time when the case was reported to the police. The time when a case was reported does not always reflect when the time of the actual commission of the homicide. Also one can notice that the hours were categorised in morning (6:00am to 11:59am), afternoon (12:00pm to 05:59pm), evening (6:00pm to 5:59am) and unknown. It is evident that the number of evening hours doubles the hours in the morning and afternoon. In 47.5% of the cases the police received the report during evening hours. However, this does not exclude that part of the 20.8% of the cases reported during morning hours and those listed as 'unknown' (17.6%) were committed during night time. This would signify that more around 85% of the homicide cases are committed during evening time. An interesting outcome (Table 5) is that homicide caused by an explosion occurred mainly in morning (40%) and afternoon hours (26.7%). The number of cases that occurred during morning and afternoon hours doubles the number of homicide by explosion that occurred during evening hours.

Table 5: Modus operandi vs Approximate time

			Approximate time				Total
			Unknown	Afternoon (1200pm - 0600pm)	Evening (06:00pm - 05:59am)	Morning (06:00am - 11:59pm)	
Modus operandi	Stabbing	Count	11	6	32	13	62
		% within Modus operandi	17.7%	9.7%	51.6%	21.0%	100.0%
	Shooting	Count	10	18	51	25	104
		% within Modus operandi	9.6%	17.3%	49.0%	24.0%	100.0%
	Asphyxia/ Strangulation	Count	12	4	6	4	26
		% within Modus operandi	46.2%	15.4%	23.1%	15.4%	100.0%
	Hit by blunt object / Blows / Fall	Count	7	3	16	4	30
		% within Modus operandi	23.3%	10.0%	53.3%	13.3%	100.0%
	Run over by vehicle	Count	1	1	1	1	4
		% within Modus operandi	25.0%	25.0%	25.0%	25.0%	100.0%
	Explosion	Count	0	4	5	6	15
		% within Modus operandi	0.0%	26.7%	33.3%	40.0%	100.0%
	Hijack	Count	0	0	2	0	2
		% within Modus operandi	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	Other / unknown	Count	4	0	8	0	12
		% within Modus operandi	33.3%	0.0%	66.7%	0.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	45	36	121	53	255
		% within Modus operandi	17.6%	14.1%	47.5%	20.8%	100.0%

$X^2(21) = 41.325$, p=0.005

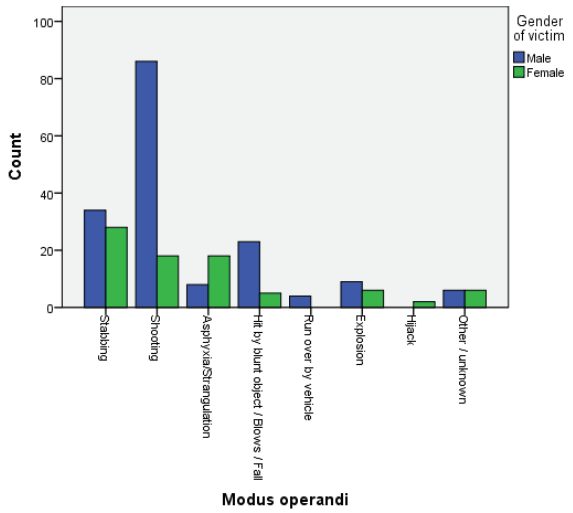
Another interesting outcome outlines the different MO in relation to the gender of the victim. Most of the MOs tend to be more frequent on male victims. The only exception is asphyxia or strangulation, where the use of such method of killing tends to be significantly more common in case of female victims (as shown in Table 6 and Figure 5).

Table 6: Modus operandi vs Gender of victim

			Gender of victim		Total
			Male	Female	
Modus operandi	Stabbing	Count	34	28	62
		% within Modus operandi	54.8%	45.2%	100.0%
	Shooting	Count	86	18	104
		% within Modus operandi	82.7%	17.3%	100.0%
	Asphyxia/Strangulation	Count	8	18	26
		% within Modus operandi	30.8%	69.2%	100.0%
	Hit by blunt object / Blows / Fall	Count	23	5	28
		% within Modus operandi	82.1%	17.9%	100.0%
	Run over by vehicle	Count	4	0	4
		% within Modus operandi	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	Explosion	Count	9	6	15
		% within Modus operandi	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%
	Hijack	Count	0	2	2
		% within Modus operandi	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Other / unknown	Count	6	6	12
		% within Modus operandi	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	170	83	253
		% within Modus operandi	67.2%	32.8%	100.0%

$X^2(7) = 42.124$, p=0.001

Figure 5: Modus operandi vs Gender of victim



Another interesting aspect explored inquired in this paper was the effect of the relationship with the perpetrator. The categories of relationship were group as follows: intimate relationship, burglary, acquaintance (friend or business partner), fight (argument or altercation), domestic, unknown, self-defence and terrorism (or political incident). Intimate relationships included all those cases that are linked to uxoricide where the victim was the husband, wife, partner, ex-partner or the new partner of an ex-partner. For the purpose of this paper domestic relationships include all those relationships that encapsulate fratricide, matricide, patricide, prolicide, as well as homicides of in-laws. The highest rates of homicides were in cases of intimate relationships (20.4%), friendships (20.9%) and altercations (20.4%) respectively

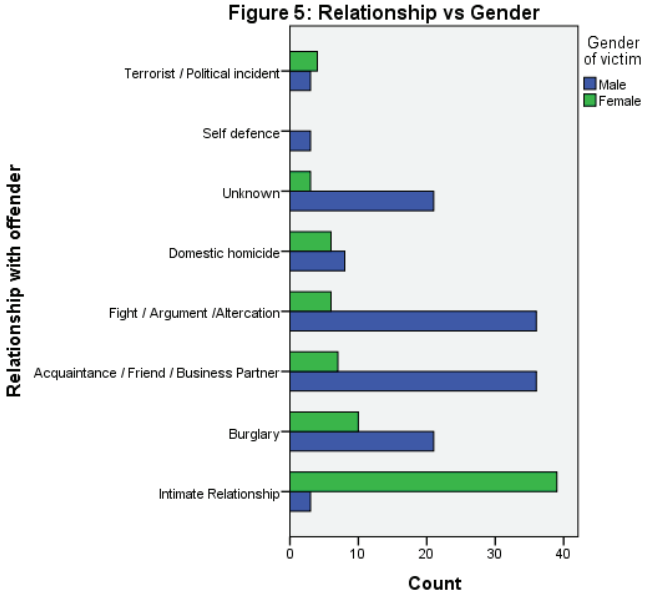
In looking at how the kind of relationship of the victim with the perpetrator could relate to the gender of the victim, it was evident that intimate relationships are significantly related to female victims. Table 7 shows that in almost 93% of the homicides where the perpetrator had an intimate relationship with the victim, the victim was female. Cases that involved acquaintance, business or friendship or some kind of altercation, self-defence and also for some unknown reasons, the results were much higher for male victims. These significant relations are also evident in Figure 5.

Table 7: Relationship with offender vs Gender of victim

			Gender of victim		Total
			Male	Female	
Relationship with offender	Intimate Relationship	Count	3	39	42
		% within Relationship with offender	7.1%	92.9%	100.0%
	Burglary	Count	21	10	31
		% within Relationship with offender	67.7%	32.3%	100.0%
	Acquaintance / Friend / Business Partner	Count	36	7	43
		% within Relationship with offender	83.7%	16.3%	100.0%
	Fight / Argument / Altercation	Count	36	6	42
		% within Relationship with offender	85.7%	14.3%	100.0%
	Domestic homicide	Count	8	6	14
		% within Relationship with offender	57.1%	42.9%	100.0%
	Unknown	Count	21	3	24
		% within Relationship with offender	87.5%	12.5%	100.0%
	Self defence	Count	3	0	3
		% within Relationship with offender	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	Terrorist / Political incident	Count	3	4	7
		% within Relationship with offender	42.9%	57.1%	100.0%
Total		Count	131	75	206
		% within Relationship with offender	63.6%	36.4%	100.0%

$X^2(7) = 81.099$, $p = 0.001$

Figure 5: Relationship vs Gender



As the relationship between perpetrators and victims proved to be such a significant element, this paper moved on to explore whether these relationships were significant in the modus operandi employed in the homicide. Table 8 indicates that there is a significant likelihood that

the relationship with the perpetrator affect the modus operandi employed in homicides committed in Malta. In cases were intimate relationship is involved there is a higher probability that stabbing (45.2%) would be used in comparison to shooting (21.4%), asphyxia (14.3%) and hit with a blunt object (14.3%). Stabbing also proved to be more likely to be used in cases of self-defence. Cases of burglary indicated a higher likelihood (41.9%) that shooting is the primary method of committing homicide. With 32.3% strangulation proved to be second most preferred method to be used in burglaries. Table 9 indicates that the modus operandi of a homicide is significantly associated with the age of the victim. In 48% of homicide by asphyxia the victims were 61 years or older. This method scored high following a series of home burglaries on elderly who were tied so firmly that eventually asphyxia took place. Homicide by shooting proved to be significantly high in arguments with friends and/or colleagues, altercations, domestic cases as well as in cases with an unknown motive, hence relation. Homicide by shooting tends to occur mainly in between the ages of 21 to 50 years, which amount 64.3% of the all shooting cases under analysis.

Table 8: Relationship with offender vs Modus operandi

			Modus operandi								Total
			Stabbing	Shooting	Asphyxia / Strangulation	Hit by blunt object / Blows / Fall	Run over by vehicle	Explosion	Hijack	Other / unknown	
Relationship with offender	Intimate Relationship	Count	19	9	6	6	0	1	0	1	42
		% within Relationship with offender	45.2%	21.4%	14.3%	14.3%	0.0%	2.4%	0.0%	2.4%	100.0%
		% within Modus operandi	32.8%	10.6%	31.6%	23.1%	0.0%	16.7%	0.0%	14.3%	20.4%
	Burglary	Count	4	13	10	2	0	0	0	2	31
		% within Relationship with offender	12.9%	41.9%	32.3%	6.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.5%	100.0%
		% within Modus operandi	6.9%	15.3%	52.6%	7.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	28.6%	15.0%
	Acquaintance / Friend / Business Partner	Count	13	20	0	5	2	0	0	3	43
		% within Relationship with offender	30.2%	46.5%	0.0%	11.6%	4.7%	0.0%	0.0%	7.0%	100.0%
		% within Modus operandi	22.4%	23.5%	0.0%	19.2%	66.7%	0.0%	0.0%	42.9%	20.9%
	Fight / Argument / Altercation	Count	14	17	1	9	0	0	0	1	42
		% within Relationship with offender	33.3%	40.5%	2.4%	21.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%	100.0%
		% within Modus operandi	24.1%	20.0%	5.3%	34.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	14.3%	20.4%
	Domestic homicide	Count	2	10	1	1	0	0	0	0	14
		% within Relationship with offender	14.3%	71.4%	7.1%	7.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Modus operandi	3.4%	11.8%	5.3%	3.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.8%
	Unknown	Count	2	13	1	3	1	4	0	0	24
		% within Relationship with offender	8.3%	54.2%	4.2%	12.5%	4.2%	16.7%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Modus operandi	3.4%	15.3%	5.3%	11.5%	33.3%	66.7%	0.0%	0.0%	11.7%
	Self defence	Count	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
		% within Relationship with offender	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Modus operandi	3.4%	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.5%
	Terrorist / Political incident	Count	2	2	0	0	0	1	2	0	7
		% within Relationship with offender	28.6%	28.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	14.3%	28.6%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Modus operandi	3.4%	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	100.0%	0.0%	3.4%
Total		Count	58	85	19	26	3	6	2	7	206
		% within Relationship with offender	28.2%	41.3%	9.2%	12.6%	1.5%	2.9%	1.0%	3.4%	100.0%
		% within Modus operandi	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

$X^2(49) = 144.007$, $p = 0.001$

Table 9: Modus operandi vs Age of victim

			Age of victim									Total
			0-10 years	11-20 years	21-30 years	31-40 years	41-50 years	51-60 years	61-70 years	71-80 years	81-90 years	
Modus operandi	Stabbing	Count	1	6	21	11	8	5	7	2	0	61
		% within Modus operandi	1.6%	9.8%	34.4%	18.0%	13.1%	8.2%	11.5%	3.3%	0.0%	100.0%
	Shooting	Count	1	5	15	24	24	17	10	2	0	98
		% within Modus operandi	1.0%	5.1%	15.3%	24.5%	24.5%	17.3%	10.2%	2.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	Asphyxia/ Strangulation	Count	0	0	4	5	2	2	2	5	5	25
		% within Modus operandi	0.0%	0.0%	16.0%	20.0%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%	20.0%	20.0%	100.0%
	Hit by blunt object / Blows / Fall	Count	2	1	8	9	1	1	2	2	1	27
		% within Modus operandi	7.4%	3.7%	29.6%	33.3%	3.7%	3.7%	7.4%	7.4%	3.7%	100.0%
	Run over by vehicle	Count	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	3
		% within Modus operandi	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	100.0%
	Explosion	Count	1	1	1	4	2	2	2	0	1	14
		% within Modus operandi	7.1%	7.1%	7.1%	28.6%	14.3%	14.3%	14.3%	0.0%	7.1%	100.0%
	Hijack	Count	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
		% within Modus operandi	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	Other / unknown	Count	0	3	1	1	1	1	1	2	0	10
		% within Modus operandi	0.0%	30.0%	10.0%	10.0%	10.0%	10.0%	10.0%	20.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	5	16	51	55	39	29	24	14	7	240
		% within Modus operandi	2.1%	6.7%	21.3%	22.9%	16.3%	12.1%	10.0%	5.8%	2.9%	100.0%

$X^2(56) = 102.037$, $p = 0.001$

Since 15.7% of all murdered victims in the period under analysis are non-Maltese it was considered important identify whether there is a significant relation between the nationality of the victim and that of the offender. Table 10 indicates that there is a significant probability that Maltese victims are targeted mainly by Maltese offenders ((93%). Meanwhile non-Maltese offenders tend target non-Maltese victims (62.5%). This table is excluding those cases where the offender was never identified. In case where there were multiple offenders the nationality of the prime suspect was taken in consideration paper focuses mainly on victims (see Figure 6).

Table 10: Victim Maltese or Non-Maltese vs Offender Maltese or Non-Maltese

			Offender Maltese or Non-Maltese		Total
			Maltese	Non-Maltese	
Victim Maltese or Non-Maltese	Maltese	Count	146	11	157
		% within Victim Maltese or Non-Maltese	93.0%	7.0%	100.0%
	Non-Maltese	Count	12	20	32
		% within Victim Maltese or Non-Maltese	37.5%	62.5%	100.0%
Total		Count	158	31	189
		% within Victim Maltese or Non-Maltese	83.6%	16.4%	100.0%

$X^2(1) = 59.701$, $p = 0.001$

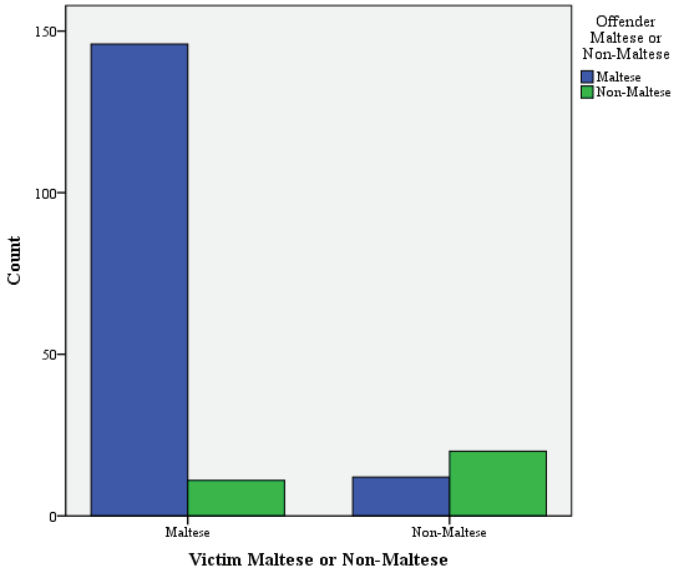


Figure 6: Victims' nationality vs Offenders' nationality

Homicide clearance in Malta is another aspect that should be explored in more depth. From the homicide cases of the last 48 years, 73.3% were solved. One of the first finding was the significant relation between homicide clearance and the modus operandi. The overall trend is that homicide cases are solved. The only evident exception are cases where explosions are involved. With a probability of 66.7%, cases were explosions were involved tend to remain unsolved. This links to Table 8 (above) where it could not be established some kind of relationship between the victims and the offenders, and the use of explosion. Thus, in 16.7% of those cases were the relationship was considered as 'unknown' explosions were used. This also reflects in the 66.7% of explosion could not be linked to a specific kind of relation between the offender/s if ever identified and the victim (see Table 8).

Table 11: Modus operandi vs Homicide clearance

			Homicide Clearance		Total
			Solved	Unsolved	
Modus operandi	Stabbing	Count	56	6	62
		% within Modus operandi	90.3%	9.7%	100.0%
	Shooting	Count	75	29	104
		% within Modus operandi	72.1%	27.9%	100.0%
	Asphyxia/Strangulation	Count	13	13	26
		% within Modus operandi	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	Hit by blunt object / Blows / Fall	Count	25	5	30
		% within Modus operandi	83.3%	16.7%	100.0%
	Run over by vehicle	Count	3	1	4
		% within Modus operandi	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%
	Explosion	Count	5	10	15
		% within Modus operandi	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
	Hijack	Count	2	0	2
		% within Modus operandi	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	Other / unknown	Count	8	4	12
		% within Modus operandi	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	158	68	255
		% within Modus operandi	83.6%	26.7%	100.0%

$X^2(7) = 31.281$, $p = 0.001$

DISCUSSION

Homicide trends began in 1970s mainly by social historians when examining judicial records and adopting social science methodologies (Eisner, 2017: 568). However, as Salafati (2001: 286) explicated while citing Cheatwood (in Smith, 2000: 9) "the field is weak in studies of international homicide, whether in stand-alone studies of specific countries or in comparative studies…". The epidemiology of homicide in Malta is no exception. This paper provides initial results which should create the foundations to increase and improve research on the phenomenon of homicide. Delineating the homicide trends in the last 48 years proved to be no easy task even though the number of homicides did not amount more than 237 cases with 255 victims.

Overall these years the number of male victim of homicide doubles that of female victims reflecting (Aebi & Linde, 2014). Additionally, the situation in Europe is more complex and the huge differences among and within countries make it more difficult compare a particular homicide trend in a country with another (Salafati, 2001). As Aebi and Linder (2014) examine the distribution of ages the most significant result is that victims belong mainly to the 30–44 age group. This is also reflected in the ages of the Maltese victims of homicide where the highest percentages, 44.2% of all homicide analysed in this paper (Table 2), ranged between 21and 40 years. This age range is exceptionally high when compared to international level where according to UNODC (2014), 43% of all victims of homicide are aged between15 and 29 years.

To provide a reliable incidence rate of homicides in Malta it had to be analysed per 100,000 to be comparable to the statistics produced by the World Health Organization (WHO). Aebi and Linder (2014: 555) cited various authors (LaFree, 2005; Kalish; 1988; Neapolitan, 1997; Messner and Rosenfeld, 1997), that show a general agreement in considering the WHO data compelling and trustworthy in cross-national comparisons of homicide. According to the UNODC (2014) the global average homicide rate stands at 6.2 per 100,000. As indicated in Figure 2 the overall incidence for homicide in Malta is of 1.4, which incidence decreases to 1.2 when not considering those homicides committed by non-Maltese nationals. The only instance where the homicide rates of males was significantly high was in 1981 with an incidence was of 5.2 (Figure 4).

The use of firearms is the most common in homicide in Malta as it appeared in almost 41% of the cases analysed. However, this does not seem to be always associated with intimate partner homicide as indicated in Sivaraman, Ranapurwala, Moracco and Marshall (2019). Table 6 indicates that shooting in Malta is mainly used against male [in 82.7% of the cases] and there were instances where stabbing and hitting with a blunt object followed the shooting (Table 4). In case of female homicide victims, death by asphyxia seems to be a more common trend in Malta. Yet looking for the incidence of the respective modus operandi in relation with age (Table 9) it was indicated that murder by asphyxia is more common in the ages 21 to 40 (36%) and even more among elderly age ranging 61 to 90, with 48% of the analysed cases. A similar trend is found in Dooley's (1995) report *Homicide in Ireland*. The trend in cases of intimate relationship in Malta is murder by stabbing (see Table 8 above).

Dooley (1995: 26) considers that homicide by strangulation or asphyxiation is associated with a sexual motive. On similar terms Radojevic et al (2013) associated multiple stabbing with the sexual motive of the murderer. In Malta, the majority (92.9%) of victims of homicide cases involving intimate relationships were female victims (Table 7). Stabbing was the method that led to the death of 45.2% of the 42 homicide cases with an intimate motive (Table 8). Other than intimate relationships, the other two predominant motives in the analysed cases are altercations and acquaintance. This also mirrored in the incidence found between the nationality of victims and that of offenders, where there tends to be a higher probability that an offender targets a victims of the same nationality (Table 10). While discussing a decline in killings, Birkel and Dern (2012) described this trend of killings among fellow-countrymen.

The final aspect explored in this paper deals with homicide clearance. The overall trend on homicide clearance is that the Malta Police Force solved 73.3% of all the of the respective victims. As indicated by Liem et al. (2018) this is slightly lower than Canada which has a clearance rate of 75% (Mahony and Turner, 2012) and marginally higher than the United States with 65%

clearance rate (Roberts, 2008). As Table 11 indicates homicide with the use of explosive results in the highest incidence of unsolved cases. Cases were explosions are involved will incur a high level of forensic evidence gathering which does not necessarily facilitate the identification of an offender and the eventual prosecution in comparison with other police investigative techniques (Baskin and Sommers, 2010)

CONCLUSIONS

Considering this is paper presents some of the first findings of the analyses of homicide cases in the last 48 years, it is possible to conclude by attesting that research on various aspects of homicide in Malta is possible because data is available and can be gathered from various sources. Results show how the homicide incidence rate is on the decline and pretty low but still there is room for improvement and bring the incidence level further down for both male and female. A more thorough analysis of what were the various motivation that led to the murder could provide potential indicator that could be addressed in prevention of potential killings.

Basic data on homicide cases rendered possible to outline a number of trends that reflect on modus operandi, gender, relationships, age and nationality and homicide clearance. It is evident that shooting and stabbing are the most common methods of killing in Malta. Yet this paper managed to associate the modus operandi with approximate time of reporting of the homicide case, with the gender of the victim, the relationship between the offender and victim and the age of the victim. The data collected also permitted the analysis of the trends of killings among genders and how this varies together the respective identified relationship. Furthermore, the relationship of the nationality of the both victims and the perpetrators proved to be a significant factor to be taken in consideration. The final point of this paper showed also a significant relation between homicide clearance and the method of killing, which identifies killing by explosion as being as weakness in solving the cases. As these first findings shall help in putting homicide research in Malta on the academic map as well as help the police department to understand better the homicide trends in Malta, it is hoped that the results inspire future research on the phenomenon of homicide on the Maltese islands.

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